

The Holy Angels of God



*"Bless the Lord, all ye, His Angels, you that are mighty in strength,
and execute His word, hearkening to the voice of His orders."*

Psalm cii.

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By

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COVER ART:

*“Canto 31” from Paradiso (The Divine Comedy) by Dante, Illustrated, Complete. Rosa Celeste: Dante and Beatrice gaze upon the highest Heaven. This engraving is one of many illustrations completed by Paul Gustave Doré (1832 – 1883) for Paradiso. It is in the Public Domain. **



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A STRIKING feature of the history of the human race, as set forth for our instruction and contemplation in the Bible, is the kindly dealing of Angels with men. We read that the holy spirits, appearing in visible forms on certain important occasions, made known how the Creator's Will was to be carried into effect for man's benefit in time and eternity. As those sublime intelligences are to be our companions in bliss and glory throughout the endless years of our life in heaven, it is assuredly fitting that here on earth we should try to know and love beings so worthy of esteem for their peerless perfection and of gratitude and affection for the many benefits they confer on man.

Angels are the most noble and beautiful creations of God's wisdom and power. They are princes of heaven and the brightest images of Divine excellence. Not imprisoned, as men are, in corruptible bodies, they are all-pure spirits, like God Himself, and are endowed with surpassing natural and supernatural gifts. Man, in his nature, is inferior to them in every way; he is made, the Scripture declares, "less than the Angels." After death, however, when we are delivered from the bonds of corruption, we will share in their privileges and their glory.

In the beginning, the Angels did not see God face to face. That Beatific Vision was to be the reward of their obedience and humility. To test their love of God, they were subjected to a trial. As is generally believed, the Son of God, in His future Incarnation as man, was proposed to them as the object of their adoration. No doubt, God the Son, considered merely in His human nature with a body formed of the dust of the earth, was inferior to the Angels, who were spirits; but that human nature, by reason of its union with the Divinity, was worthy of their profound veneration and worship. Lucifer, one of the chief Angels, seeing his own excellence, was puffed up with pride and refused to obey. Michael and the spirits faithful to God, preserved by reverence and truth in true humility, fought against the rebels and cast them into the prison "which was prepared for the devil and his angels." "I saw," said Our Lord Jesus Christ, "Satan like lightning falling from heaven."

As a reward for their fidelity, God's Holy Angels were admitted to gaze upon their Creator with unclouded knowledge. Standing in His presence and inflamed with perfect love, they are clothed with surpassing splendor, and thrill with complete and eternal happiness that is ever fresh and new. Those glorious beings are most worthy of our reverence. Because they are spirits, we cannot see them with our eyes of flesh. Yet, when given Divine permission, they make themselves visible to men. They always appear under a noble and gracious form. It is as if their beauty is incapable of being wholly concealed so it breaks through their assumed external appearance.

Thus, the Bible tells us that the Angel Raphael showed himself to Tobias as “a beautiful young man.” King Nabuchodonosor saw an Angel whose majestic and dazzling loveliness could belong to none, he thought, but the Son of God. When the prophet Daniel stood one day by the great river Tigris, he beheld an Angel who was dressed in snow-white linen and girt with cincture of finest gold. “His body was like the chrysolite, his face as the appearance of lightning, his eyes as a burning lamp; and his arms and all downward, even to the feet, like in appearance to glittering brass, and the voice of his word like the voice of a multitude” (Dan. x. 4, 8). Consternation seized the prophet, and his strength ebbing away, he fell on the earth and held his face close to the ground. The Angel gently raised him to his feet and gave him strength to hear a message from God regarding the coming of the promised Messiah.

Each human being has an Angel to stand ever by his side, to help him resist temptation and win the Kingdom of Heaven. How much we owe our Guardian Angels! They preserve us from many unknown dangers to soul and body. They defend us against the demons. They breathe holy thoughts into our soul; they prompt us to deeds, even heroic deeds, of virtue in the Divine service, and they fling their mighty strength around us when we are dying and thus save us from the last attacks of our spiritual foes. They are full of zeal and jealous for God’s honor, for the interest of those committed to their care, and for the innocence of the young. “Beware,” says Our Savior, “of giving scandal to those little ones, for their Angels always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.” Saint Bernard tells us that we owe our Angels profound respect for their presence, confidence in their love and power to protect us, as well as gratitude for the great benefits that they confer. The heavenly spirits look upon themselves as our elder brothers. Nay, to speak in our human way, they are passionate lovers of all whom God has charged them to guard. Saint Paul says, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation” (Heb. i. 14)? In the 90th Psalm, the Holy Ghost declares, “No evil shall approach unto thee, neither shall the scourge come nigh thy dwelling. For He hath given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Through this angelic guardianship, “thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk; the lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot.” Thus do they watch over each individual soul, even if that soul is in a state of sin, and they act as protectors to hamlets, cities, and kingdoms.

In the Book of Exodus (xiii. 21), we see how an Angel of God went before the people in the desert to show the way in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night so he could be the guide of their journey at both times. We may, indeed, say that this earth of ours is full of innumerable spirits to defend all who are specially dear to God. When an army, with horses and chariots, beset the city of Samaria to slay the prophet Eliseus, the prophet’s servant cried out in terror. Eliseus prayed, “Lord, open his eyes that he may

see.” The Lord opened the eyes of the servant and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Eliseus. The prophet said, “Fear not, for, as thou seest, there are more with us than with them” (4 Kings, chap. vi). Also, when Sennacherib, the King of the Assyrians, marched with a mighty army against Jerusalem, an Angel of the Lord protected the city and, entering into the Assyrian camp in the night, slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand men; and Sennacherib departed and returned to his own land. This event is graphically described by the poet:

For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved and forever grew still.
And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broken in the temples of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, smote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

The prophet Zachary represents the Angels as declaring, “We have walked through the earth, and behold all the earth is inhabited and at rest” (i. II). Thus, by day and by night, countless angelic guardians fill this world of ours and keep watch both when we wake and when we sleep. In the works of Cardinal Newman, a beautiful passage dwells upon this fact of the Angels’ unresting watchfulness in their ministry among men and of their unceasing operations in the sphere of nature and of grace. The passage referred to is hereby quoted in full:

When we survey Almighty God surrounded by His Holy Angels, His thousand-thousands of ministering spirits, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him, the idea of His awful majesty rises before us more powerfully and impressively and we begin to see how little we are, how altogether mean and worthless in ourselves, and how high He is and fearful.

The very lowest of His Angels is indefinitely above us in this our present state. Then, how high must be the Lord of Angels! The very Seraphim hide their faces before His glory while they praise Him. How shamefaced, then, should sinners be, when they come into His presence! Thus, whenever we look abroad, we are reminded of those most gracious and holy beings, the servants of the Holiest, who deign to minister to the heirs of salvation. Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God in heaven. So, I put it to anyone whether it is not as

philosophical, and as full of intellectual enjoyment, to refer the movements of the natural world to them as to attempt to explain them by certain theories of science, useful as these theories certainly are for particular purposes, and capable (in subordination to that higher view) of a religious application.

Suppose an inquirer into Nature, when examining a flower, an herb, a pebble, or a ray of light that he treats as something beneath him in the scale of existence, suddenly discovered he was in the presence of some powerful being. Suppose that being was hidden behind the visible things the inquirer was inspecting and, though concealing his wise hand, was giving those inspected things their beauty, grace, and perfection, as God's instrument for the purpose. Nay, whose robe and ornament those wondrous objects were that the inquirer was so eager to analyze, what would be his thoughts?

Should we but accidentally show a rudeness of manner towards our fellowman, tread on the hem of his garment or brush roughly against him, are we not vexed, not as if we had hurt him, but from the fear we have of having been disrespectful?

David had watched the awful pestilence three days, not with curious eyes, but doubtless with indescribable terror and remorse. At length, when he lifted up his eyes and saw the Angel of the Lord (who caused the pestilence) stand between the earth and the heavens with a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem, David and the elders, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. The mysterious, irresistible pestilence became still more fearful when its cause was known.

What is true of the painful is true, on the other hand, of the pleasant and attractive operations of Nature. When we walk abroad and meditate in the field at eventide, how much has every herb and flower in it to surprise and overwhelm us? For, even if we know as much about them as the wisest of men, there are those around us, though unseen, to whom our greatest knowledge is as ignorance. Thus, when we converse on the subjects of Nature, scientifically repeating the names of plants and earths and describing their properties, we should do so religiously, as in the hearing of the great servants of God, with the sort of diffidence that we always feel when speaking before the learned and wise of our own mortal race, as poor beginners in intellectual knowledge as well as in moral attainments" (Parochial Sermons, Vol. II, Sermon 29).



Detail from Francesco Botticini's tempura on wood painting of the "Assumption of the Virgin."
This detail depicts Botticini's vision of the Nine Choirs of Angels.*







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The Angelic Spirits are divided into Nine Choirs, as mentioned in Holy Scripture.

1. The **Seraphim** have the distinguishing characteristic of burning love for God.
2. The **Cherubim** possess a wondrous knowledge of God and of His infinite beauty.
3. The **Thrones** are the representatives of God's Majesty.
4. The **Dominations** teach that the true way to hold rule or dominion and to reign is to serve God. They, therefore, possess true liberty or freedom from passion, sin, and the slavery of the devil.
5. The **Virtues** represent God's Might and impart strength and fortitude in the Divine service.
6. The **Powers** restrain the malice, craft, and power of the demons and lead men to obey all lawful authority for God's sake.
7. The **Principalities** are the guardians of provinces, kingdoms, and peoples.
8. The **Archangels** are the captains of the heavenly armies and are sent by the Most High as His messengers to men.
9. The **Angels** are the lowest Choir. The Guardians of individual human beings are taken from this choir. It may be, however, that Guardian Angels are appointed, also, from the higher Choirs.

In the Apocalypse (i.4, iv.5), we read of seven spirits who stand always before the Throne of God. The three mighty Angels, whose names are given in the Bible, belong to this glorious company:

-  Saint Michael (“Who is like God”), the conqueror of Lucifer;
-  Saint Gabriel (“the Strength of God”), the ambassador of the Incarnation; and
-  Saint Raphael, (“the Medicine of God”), endowed with the power to heal all infirmity and the ravages of sin. Some say that
-  Saint Uriel (“the Strong Companion”), is the Angel who slew the host of Sennacherib, but his name is not mentioned in the Bible.

Volumes full of most interesting matter have been written on the Holy Angels. Yet, even the slight and imperfect sketch provided in this pamphlet may serve to show how worthy of serious attention is devotion to these Heavenly Princes. It may also show us how we ought to take to heart the advice of Pope Saint Leo the Great, “*Confirmate amicitias cum sanctis angelis.*” “Make friendships with the Holy Angels.” Certainly, no earthly friends can vie with them in goodness, in power, and in love for men. Therefore, we should regard them as our most faithful friends and invoke their help daily in prosperity and affliction throughout our lives.

NOTE: An easy way to practice devotion to the Nine Choirs is to honor (by asking their prayers)

- on Sunday--the Seraphim, the Cherubim, and the Thrones;
- on Monday--the Holy Dominations;
- on Tuesday--the Holy Virtues;
- on Wednesday--the Holy Powers;
- on Thursday--the Holy Principalities;
- on Friday--the Archangels; and,
- on Saturday--the Choir of Angels.

It is extraordinary what great benefits to body, mind, and soul are obtained by sincere and persevering devotion to these Most Glorious Heavenly Princes.

Appendix

Saint Peter and His Guardian Angel

(Acts of the Apostles, Chapter xii)

At the same time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to afflict some of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take up Peter also. Now it was in the days of the azymes, and when he had apprehended him, he cast him into prison, delivering him to four files of soldiers to be kept, intending after the Pasch to bring him forth to the people. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison. But prayer was made without ceasing by the Church unto God for him.

And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And behold an Angel of the Lord stood by him: and a light shined in the room: and he striking Peter on the side raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly." And the chains fell off from his hands. And the Angel said to him, "Gird thyself, and put on thy sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." And going out, he followed him, and he knew not that it was true which was done by the Angel: but thought he saw a vision. And passing through the first and the second ward, they came to the iron gate that leadeth to the city, which of itself opened to them. And going out, they passed on through one street and immediately the Angel departed from him. And Peter coming to himself, said, "Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His Angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

And considering, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was surnamed Mark, where many were gathered together and praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, whose name was Rhode. And as soon as she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for joy, but running in she told that Peter stood before the gate. "But," they said to her, "thou art mad." But she affirmed that it was so. Then, said they, "It is his Angel." But Peter continued knocking. And when they had opened, they saw him and were astonished. But, he, beckoning to them with his hand to hold their peace, told how the Lord had brought him out of prison and he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brethren." And going out he went into another place.

Now when day was come there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not; having examined the keepers, he commanded they should be put to death. And going down from Judea to Cesarea, he abode there. And he was angry with the Tyrians and the Sidonians. But they

with one accord came to him, and having gained Blastus, who was the king's chamberlain, they desired peace, because their countries were nourished by him. And upon a day appointed, Herod being arrayed in kingly apparel, sat in the judgment seat, and made an oration to them. And the people made acclamation, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." And forthwith, an Angel of the Lord struck him, because he had not given the honor to God, and being eaten up by worms, he gave up the ghost. But the word of the Lord increased and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having fulfilled their ministry, taking with them John, who was surnamed Mark.

Saint Michael

"There was a great battle in heaven. Michael and his Angels fought with the Dragon, and the Dragon fought and his Angels: and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven" (Apoc. xii. 7, 8).

Saint Michael, who is the guardian and patron of the Church, is considered to be the first of all the Angels in glory and the most exalted of the Seraphim. He is called an Archangel when he acts as a messenger from God to men. The Lord has given him the office of defending the soul at death, conducting it to judgment, and leading it, if found pure enough, to the Kingdom of the Blessed.

The feast of Saint Michael and all Angels is observed on September 29th, every year. A similar Feast, called the Apparition of Saint Michael, falls on the 8th May. The Divine Office and Mass of the two Feasts are substantially the same.

Short Prayers

Most glorious Prince, Michael the Archangel, be mindful of us. Pray for us always, both here and everywhere, to the Son of God.

Saint Michael, Archangel, defend us in the day of battle that we may not be lost in the dreadful judgment.

100 days' Indulgence. (Leo XIII, 19th Aug., 1893)

Saint Michael, intercede for us that we may die a good death. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Michael

(From the prayers ordered by Pope Leo XIII to be said after Mass)

Blessed Michael, Archangel, defend us in the hour of conflict; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God restrain him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God, thrust Satan down to hell, and with him the other wicked spirits who wander through the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Raphael

O Glorious Archangel, Saint Raphael, great Prince of the heavenly court, illustrious for thy gifts of wisdom and grace, guide of those who journey by land or sea, consoler of the afflicted, and refuge of sinners; I beg thee to assist me in all my needs and in all the sufferings of this life, as once thou didst help the young Tobias on his travels. And because thou art the medicine of God, I humbly pray thee to heal the many infirmities of my soul, and the ills which afflict my body, if it be for my greater good. I specially ask of thee an angelic purity that may fit me to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

100 days' Indulgence, once a day. (Leo XIII, June 21st, 1890.)

Novena to Saint Michael

The Novena may be made at any time of the year, and with any form of prayers sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority.

300 days, each day.

Plenary, once during Novena. (Pius IX, Nov. 26th, 1876.)

Novena to Saint Gabriel and Saint Raphael

A Novena to either of the Archangels may be made at any time of the year with any form of prayer sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority.

300 days, each day.

Plenary, once during the Novena. (Pius IX, November 26th, 1876.)

Novena to a Guardian Angel

The Novena may be made at any time, and with any form of prayer sanctioned by competent ecclesiastical authority.

300 days' Indulgence, each day. Plenary, once during the Novena. (Pius IX, November 26th, 1876.)



"Angels Ascending"

*Engraving by Paul Gustave Doré,
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The Angel Guardian

“He hath given His Angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways” (Psalm xc).

“Reverence your Angel Guardian,” says Saint Bernard, “on account of his presence. Never do anything in his sight that you would be ashamed of before an honorable man. Be grateful for the care he has of you. Have confidence in him, love him, and therefore turn to him and entreat his protection in all difficulties, dangers, and temptations.”

The Church has appointed the 2nd of October as the day to be observed in honor of the Guardian Angels. An indulgenced Novena (300 days each day, Plenary once) might be made in preparation for the Feast.

Invocation of the Guardian Angel

O Angel of God, whom God hath appointed to be my guardian,
enlighten and protect, direct and govern me. Amen.

Angel of God, my guardian dear,
To whom His love commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

100 days' Indulgence.

Plenary on October 2nd, Feast of the Guardian Angels, if said daily, morning and evening, for a year.

Plenary, once a month.

Plenary (in articulo mortis--at the point of death) if frequently used.

(Pius VI, Brief, October 2nd, 1795; June 11th, 1796; and Pius VII, May 15th, 1821.)

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